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ADVOCATE OF PEACE.

DECEMBER., 1851.

THE RELIGIOUS ELEMENT IN REFORMS.

Reform has come to have a somewhat restricted and technical meaning. It is defined by lexicographers, a change from worse to better, a correction of what is wrong, an amendment or improvement, and in this broad sense comprehends of course whatever needs in any respect to be rectified in either individuals or communities; but, when speaking of the various reforms attempted by the combined efforts of Christians, philanthropists or patriots, we mean only the abolition or rectification of social evils, whether found in the habits of individuals, the usages of society, or the principles and policy of government. These evils relate to the present life, and lie on the surface of society, or are woven into the relations of mankind in this world. They may or may not touch our higher relations to God's moral government; and it is possible, though not probable, that they might in the main be corrected without any radical change of character, or renewal of the heart in the image of its Maker. A man, for instance, can give up all use of intoxicating drinks, cease from holding his fellow-men in bondage, or abandon the profession of arms, and all support of the war-system, without waiting to "be born again," or become "a new creature in Christ Jesus." The latter change, the most comprehensive and most important that can take place in the history of a human being, must of course facilitate, and ought in our opinion to involve the latter in its necessary consequences; but it is certainly possible to remove or seriously abate all kinds of social evils without any radical change of the religious character.

Now, we would fain guard on this subject against two errors in opposite extremes, one of which discards or undervalues the moral element in the work of reform, and the other bids us seek the general improvement of men's character as individuals, and leave that to work all needful changes in society and government. Both these errors obstruct reform; but we shall at present confine ourselves to the former as the mistake of superficial, impulsive reformers, either destitute or regardless of religious principle.

It must be confessed that all reforms are liable to this fundamental and

you can no more depend on these alone to accomplish any great reform than you could upon a bonfire of shavings to keep up the degree of heat required in a furnace for melting iron ore.

overlook those moral and religious principles which alone can either perfect or insure any great social reform. Various motives may conspire to enforce every such reform. Arguments, both pertinent and effective, may be drawn from its temporal aspects, from its bearings on the interests of this life. There is the logic of the ledger; and its calculations of loss or gain may move vast multitudes that could not be reached by any moral or religious appeals. You may very properly dissuade the drunkard from his cups not merely by reminding him of his obligations to God, but by fore-warning him of the blight which his intemperance must bring upon his worldly prosperity, and the ruin it will entail on the wife of his bosom, and the children of his love. Such appeals are always legitimate, and often effective for a time. We do not object at all to the use of them, but merely insist that these alone are insufficient for any thorough, permanent reform. Every such reform must be rooted in religious or moral principle, and derive thence its vitality, power and perfection. You may urge your argument of expediency with its utmost force; you may appeal to motives of self-interest in this life as earnestly as you please; you may group together all the considerations to be found in the wide circumference of earth and time; but you must, after all, rely for sure and full success mainly on those deeper, more powerful principles which are found only in the moral or religious element of our nature.

Here is a clue to nearly all the mistakes of honest but misguided reformers. They have overlooked the moral element in reforms, and even attempted in some cases to divorce them from religion, and make them depend for success on views of expediency, and motives of worldly interest. Such a course must ruin any reform. In considerations like these there is not power enough to give it permanent vitality; and it must soon droop and ere long die. Such has been the fate of every reform that repudiated or overlooked the Gospel. There is no other power on earth adequate to sustain and perfect any important reform in the social character or condition of mankind.

This conclusion, so far from discarding considerations of expediency, or motives of temporal interest, just invites their use as incidental helps in the work of reform. If you will only strike its roots deep in the heart and conscience, in the moral and religious principles of our nature, you may then employ as many collateral or auxiliary means as you please for its rapid growth and full development. You may depict as vividly as you can the evils of intemperance, or the miseries of war; you may expatiate on their waste of property, or the havoc they make of social and domestic happiness; you may paint the desolated hearth, the broken-hearted wife and her beggared children, or the battle-field strewed with the dead and dying, or the sacked city with its inhabitants fleeing in terror from their pillaged and burning homes. All these are very well in their place; but

fatal mistake. Dealing with what lies on the surface of men's character or condition, aiming at merely partial amendments, seeking to abolish or abate only specific evils in society or government, they are tempted to

In this particular the Quakers have set an example worthy of all imitation. They have made social reforms part and parcel of their Christianity; and here lies the chief secret of their eminent success as reformers. They learned reform from the gospel; and they employed its precepts to enforce and promote it. They were a whole century or more ahead of other Christians in reforms that have since been more or less fully accomplished,—on the subjects, for example, of temperance, freedom and peace;—and their success in accomplishing such reforms without injurious conflict among themselves, is due mainly to their reliance on the gospel for the purpose, and to the Christian spirit and wisely conservative manner in which they have prosecuted them.

Here is the true secret of our success as a people in the art of self-government. Nation after nation have tried the experiment, but signally failed, and ended in anarchy or despotism. Why? Just because they had not the intelligence and virtue, the moral and religious character, requisite for the success of such an experiment; while the open Bibles and free schools, the oft-frequented sanctuaries and well-remembered Sabbaths of our forefathers, formed the mass of our people to habits that made self-government safe, claimed it as a right, and insured it at length as a social necessity. Such a people *must* be free; and virtually free they *will* be under any form of government. Put them under the tyranny of the Stuarts; and they will in time make even such a monarchy the instrument of their own will under the all-controlling power of public opinion. They may bow reverently before the throne, and shout hosannas to the man or woman that sits thereon; but it is all the while understood well enough, that their will must in fact be the monarch's guide. They retain the form of monarchy, but infuse into it the spirit and principle of democracy. It is, after all, the people that rule; and such a people, if placed under the iron-sceptered autocracy of Russia, would eventually mould it to their will, and use it as an instrument for securing the substantial ends of a strictly popular government.

The cause of peace, more perhaps than any other reform, has from the first relied for support and success on the religious principle. It is the child of Christianity, one of her earliest, clearest, most glorious promises. If there is any enterprise resting directly on the Bible, it is that of the world's pacification, the ultimate reign of peace, as a promised result of the gospel, from the rising to the setting sun. If the Bible does not enjoin peace, it enjoins nothing; if it does not promise peace, it promises nothing; and if Christians, in obedience to its commands, seek the world's conversion, and, in reliance on its promises, expect that grand and glorious consummation, then must we in like manner seek and expect the universal reign of peace on earth.

With such views, we have always looked mainly, almost solely to

Christians for the support of this cause. It is pre-eminently their own, just as much so as the missionary enterprise; and they must lead its van, or it can never reach its promised triumph. They should enshrine it in their hearts as an integral part of their religion, and should pray and labor for it as one of the peculiar fruits and promised results of the gospel. Thus, and thus only, can we hope ever to see the manifold and measureless evils of war melting away from every Christian land, and peace with its countless blessings going hand in hand with our religion over the whole earth. Hence, too, have we sought to enlist the religious press in habitual, earnest advocacy of this cause, and called upon preachers of the gospel not only to plead its claims from year to year, but to inculcate peace at all times just as they would repentance or faith. Let them respond aright to such appeals; and they will not merely guard this cause against perversion, but will insure its speedy success, and render it a most efficient pioneer or auxiliary to every enterprise for the spiritual or the temporal welfare of our world.

PEACE A PROPER THEME FOR THE PULPIT.

Occasionally we find even in persons reputedly pious a disposition to regard the subject of peace as unsuitable for the pulpit on the Sabbath. They deem it no part of the Gospel, and treat it as a foreign, if not an antagonistic theme. If their pastor, or another in his place, is to preach a sermon on peace, they will perhaps stay away from church, and justify themselves by saying, 'we attend the sanctuary to hear the gospel, not peace; give us a gospel sermon, and we'll go, but not to hear a discourse on a topic so foreign from the Christian pulpit and Sabbath.'

It is very difficult to account for such a state of mind in a real or merely professed disciple of the Prince of Peace. The case indeed seems too plain for argument; and certainly it is passing strange that any man who has ever read either the evangelists or the prophets, the New Testament or the Old, should doubt whether peace is a part of Christianity. Did such a man ever read Isaiah's graphic, exultant prophecy of 'the last days when they shall beat their swords into plow-shares, and their spears into pruning hooks; when nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more,' as one of the grandest, most glorious results of the gospel's universal spread and triumph? Can it be that such a disciple of Christ really knows what the angels sang over his manger-cradle in Bethlehem, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth PEACE, good will to men?" Did he ever peruse and ponder the Sermon on the Mount? Did he ever glance at the multitude of similar precepts scattered from one end of the New Testament to the other?

Now, here is the fair issue we press upon this strange soit of Christian. Are these portions of the Bible a part of God's revelation? If they are not, then we have in truth no revelation that deserves the name; but, if they are, then peace is as clearly, unquestionably an element of Christianity as any other doctrine or duty taught in the Bible; and no minister of Christ can